

## Grammar Instruction: Teaching English Aspect to Japanese Learners of English

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Despite the fact that grammar is viewed as an essential aspect of language, grammar instruction is not always central in second language teaching. In this paper, I discuss the significance of grammar in second language learning and examine the characteristics of English aspect. I focus on aspectual classes of English and Japanese verbs and illustrate the similarities and differences in their lexical, syntactic, and semantic properties that can cause difficulties for Japanese learners of English. Furthermore, I propose how English aspect should be taught to second language learners, with a focus on Japanese students.

文法は言語を学ぶ上で欠かせない領域であると見なされているものの、文法指導が第二言語教育の中心に位置づけられているとは必ずしも言えないのが現状である。本論文は、第二言語習得における文法の重要性について述べ、英語のアスペクトに焦点を置きその特徴を考察する。特に、英語と日本語それぞれの動詞のアスペクトによる分類をもとに両言語を比較し、英語を学ぶ日本人学生の習得を困難にする類似点と相違点を分析する。さらに、第二言語学習者に対して英語のアスペクトをどのように指導すべきかを、日本人学生に焦点をおいて考察する。

Grammar is crucial for language learning and development. Various linguistic areas are connected to each other through grammar. However, in many cases grammar instruction is not always emphasized in teaching English as a second language (Cook, 2001; Schulz, 2001). There has even been an ongoing dialogue as to whether grammar should be explained to students. In this paper, I begin with a discussion of what is meant by grammar in second language (L2) learning. Next, I discuss how learners' first languages (L1) influence their learning development and what instruction would be appropriate for L2 learners. I then focus on English aspect in L2 learning. Aspect shows cross-linguis-

tic variation, and many L2 learners have difficulty acquiring it; therefore, I illustrate the similarities and differences in language-specific aspectual verb classes between English and Japanese. When these classes of verbs appear in a sentence, they exhibit different syntactic and semantic structural patterns. They further interact with tense and aspect and cause the difficulty faced by many Japanese learners of English (Gabriele, 2009). Furthermore, I examine methods by which English aspect can be taught to Japanese learners of English.

### Grammar in Second Language Learning

Although the term grammar is defined variously, there are two kinds of grammar that are generally referred to: prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar. Prescriptive grammar refers to the rules generally taught in school without regard to the way native speakers use the language, whereas descriptive grammar, with which linguists are concerned, relates to the description of the way native speakers use the language (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Larsen-Freeman (2014) defined grammar as “a system of lexicogrammatical patterns that are used to make meaning in appropriate ways” (p. 258).

Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman (2014) proposed a three-dimensional grammar framework: form (e.g., morphosyntactic patterns and lexical patterns), meaning (e.g., lexical meaning and grammatical meaning), and use (e.g., social context and linguistic discourse context). All three dimensions need to be mastered by the learner, and furthermore, not only the form but also the two other dimensions can create a challenge for learning. The learner needs to associate the form and meaning of the target construction within the appropriate context.

From a different perspective, the grammar that L2 learners acquire in a second language is not the same as the grammar of a native speaker (Cook & Singleton, 2014). L2 learners already possess an L1 grammar; they additionally acquire the L2 grammar in different ways through teaching, social encounters, and so on.

## The Role of the First Language

The theory of contrastive analysis (comparing a learner's L1 and L2 to determine potential errors) was extensively used in the field of second language acquisition in the 1960s. This theory was based on the notion of transfer (i.e., the influence of a learner's L1 knowledge in the L2) alone; similarities implied learning ease whereas differences implied learning difficulty. However, during the 1970s, interlanguage theory became widely used. Here the L2 learner uses an independent language system that is neither part of the L1 nor L2 learning sequence (Selinker, 1972). In the late 1970s, the emphasis was placed on when and how transfer takes place rather than an acceptance or rejection of the role of the L1. It was suggested that some L1-L2 differences may be relatively easy to learn due to their saliency (Kleinmann, 1977), but some L1-L2 similarities may obscure what needs to be learned (Ringbom, 1987). Oller and Ziahosseiny (1970) also suggested that L2 learning may be difficult where subtle distinctions are required either between the L1 and L2 or within the L2.

Moreover, L1-L2 differences can lead to avoidance in that the L1 may influence not only which structures the learner produces but also which structures are avoided by the learner (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Schachter, 1974). It has been further claimed that there is interaction among the L1, cognitive processes, and the L2 (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Odlin, 2003). Thus, the term cross-linguistic influence rather than transfer is now often used to reflect the complex ways in which the learners' L1 may affect their L2. How L2 learners relate their L1 to their L2 is crucial in understanding how L2 learning is affected by the knowledge of the L1 (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

## Instruction for Second Language Learners

Second language acquisition is quite different from first language acquisition. One should not expect students to learn their L2 as children learn an L1. It has also been reported that young children are more likely to learn an L2 easier than adults (DeKeyser, 2000; Johnson & Newport, 1989; Patkowski, 1980; Piske, Flege, Mackay & Meador, 2002). Spolsky (1989) described age-related L2 learning and argued that although natural L2 learning may be suitable for children, formal classroom learning, which requires sophisticated understanding and reasoning, is more suitable for older learners.

In addition, White (1987) claimed that positive evidence (i.e., input) is not always sufficient for L2 learners to analyze complex grammatical structures. Positive evidence contains information about what is possible in the L2 but not about what is not possible (Spada, 1997). L2 learners, therefore, need the negative evidence (e.g., error correction) that they get from instruction in order to understand L1-L2 differences.

Attention and awareness play a crucial role in L2 learning (Gass & Schmidt, 2012; Robinson, Mackey, Venkatagiri & Levis, 2007). Schmidt (1990, 2001, 2010) argued that attention to the linguistic features that are not present in learners' L1 may be necessary if adult L2 learners are to acquire them. Moreover, explicit instruction is effective in raising attention and awareness in L2 classrooms (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010). Explicit instruction is described as helping learners develop metalinguistic awareness of a rule; this can be done deductively by giving learners a description of the rule or inductively by helping learners infer the rule from data (DeKeyser, 2008; Ellis, 2009). Similarly, Larsen-Freeman (2014) suggested that L2 learners, particularly older ones, might benefit from explicit instruction of grammatical rules and patterns; learners' consciousness can be raised by inducing a grammatical generalization from the data they are given. Moreover, research on form-focused instruction, which draws learners' attention to linguistic form, has also indicated the positive effects of explicit instruction on L2 learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Spada, 1997; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Learners' attention can be focused on a specific part of the language, particularly on mismatches between L1 and L2 forms (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

## Aspectual Characteristics of English and Japanese

As discussed in the previous sections, L2 learners need to master all grammatical dimensions (form, meaning, and use) in order to acquire the target grammatical structure. In addition, cross-linguistic differences influence L2 learners' learning development. It is crucial to understand how the learner relates the L1 to the L2 in his or her learning process. Aspect shows cross-linguistic variation, and there are similarities and differences in aspectual patterns between English and Japanese. Therefore, it seems relevant to examine the aspectual characteristics of both languages so that we may understand how English aspect can be taught to Japanese students.

## Vendler's English Verb Classes

Crystal (1994) defined aspect as a grammatical category that marks the duration or type of temporal activity denoted by the verb (e.g., progressive and perfect) and is distinguished from tense, which expresses the time of a situation described in a proposition relative to some other time (e.g., past, present, and future). Semantic differences inherent in the meanings of verbs themselves cause them to have different interpretations when combined with aspect markers (Dowty, 1979). Verkuyl (1972) said that aspect is determined compositionally by properties of the verb in conjunction with the verb's arguments and adjuncts (i.e., the other elements in a sentence.)

Vendler (1957) distinguished four distinct aspectual classes of English verbs (states, activities, accomplishments and achievements) based on inherent temporal properties as listed below:

Classes	Examples
States	know, love, believe, want, have
Activities	run, walk, swim, push, pull
Accomplishments	paint a picture, make a chair, build a house, write a letter, draw a circle
Achievements	recognize, realize, notice, identify, find

The aspectual properties of each class can be analyzed in terms of features: [±static] (i.e., expressing a state), [±telic] (i.e., having a terminal point), and [±punctual] (i.e., no duration implied) as below (Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997):

Classes	Features		
States	+ static	- telic	- punctual
Activities	- static	- telic	- punctual
Accomplishments	- static	+ telic	- punctual
Achievements	- static	+ telic	+ punctual

Furthermore, when these classes of verbs appear in a sentence, they exhibit different structural patterns, reflecting the verb's inherent meaning. Some tests are generally used to show each class's distinct structural patterns (Vendler, 1957; Dowty, 1979). The following are their general structural patterns taken from Vendler and Dowty with some modifications.

I. States ([+static]) and achievements ([+punctual]) cannot occur in the progressive:

- (1) a. \*John is knowing the answer. (state)
  - b. John is running. (activity)
  - c. John is painting a picture. (accomplishment)
  - d. \*John is recognizing her. (achievement)
- (\* = ungrammatical)

It should be noted that achievement verbs can occur with the *-ing* form (e.g., *He is dying*; *The train is arriving*). However, these sentences do not have a progressive meaning, but rather the implication of reaching an end point.

II. Activities ([-telic], [-punctual]) occur with *for*-phrases, but accomplishments ([+telic], [-punctual]) occur with *in*-phrases:

- (2) a. John walked for an hour. (activity)
- b. \*John walked in an hour.
- c. \*John wrote a letter for an hour. (accomplishment)
- d. John wrote a letter in an hour.

States ([+static]) do not occur with either *for*-phrases or *in*-phrases because they are not processes happening in time. Also, achievements ([+punctual]) imply no duration; therefore, they do not express that something happens during a specific time. Although the sentence *John recognized her in a few minutes* is grammatical, it does not entail that John was recognizing her *for* a few minutes.

III. Achievements ([+punctual]) cannot occur with the verb *finish*:

- (3) a. \*John finished loving her. (state)
- b. John finished swimming. (activity)
- c. John finished making a chair. (accomplishment)
- d. \*John finished noticing the painting. (achievement)

As discussed above, states ([+static]) are not processes happening in time and achievements ([+punctual]) imply no duration; therefore, unlike activities and accomplishments, these classes of verbs are unacceptable as complements of *finish*.

### Kindaichi's Japanese Verb Classes

Kindaichi (1950) similarly proposed four aspectual classes of Japanese verbs: stative (*jotai doshi*), continuative (*keizoku doshi*), instantaneous (*shunkan doshi*) and Type Four (*dai yon-shu no doshi*). The four classes and their examples are shown below:

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Classes	Examples
Stative	<i>aru</i> (be), <i>iru</i> (need), <i>dekiru</i> (can do), <i>mieru</i> (be visible)
Continuative	<i>yomu</i> (read), <i>kaku</i> (write), <i>hashiru</i> (run), <i>oyogu</i> (swim)
Instantaneous	<i>kizuku</i> (notice), <i>tsuku</i> (light up), <i>shinu</i> (die), <i>aku</i> (open)
Type Four	<i>sugureru</i> (be excellent), <i>arifureru</i> (be common), <i>zubanukeru</i> (be outstanding), <i>bakageru</i> (be absurd)

The aspectual properties of each class can be analyzed in terms of features: [±static], [±telic], and [±punctual] as below:

Classes	Features		
Stative	+ static	- telic	- punctual
Continuative	- static	- telic	- punctual
Instantaneous	- static	+ telic	+ punctual
Type Four	+ static	- telic	- punctual

As shown above, if these verb classes are examined based on lexical semantic properties, stative and Type Four classes correspond to Vendler's (1957) states, continuative corresponds to Vendler's activities, and instantaneous corresponds to Vendler's achievements.

However, when these classes appear in a sentence, they exhibit different structural and semantic properties. It should be noted that Kindaichi's (1950) classification is based on the aspectual *-te iru* construction, which can take the meaning of progressive, resultative state, or experiential state mainly depending on the verb's inherent meaning. The morpheme *-te iru* partly corresponds to the English morpheme *-ing*. The general characteristics are shown below:

I. Stative verbs cannot occur in the *-te iru* construction. This structural pattern is similar to that of English state verbs.

- (4) a. Kare-wa kuruma-ga aru.  
he-TOP car-NOM be  
He has a car.

- b. \*Kare-wa kuruma-ga at-te iru.  
he-TOP car-NOM be-TE IRU
- c. Watashi-wa okane-ga iru.  
I-TOP money-NOM need  
I need money.
- d. \*Watashi-wa okane-ga it-te iru.  
I-TOP money-NOM need-TE IRU

(TOP = topic; NOM = nominative)

II. Continuative verbs have a progressive meaning in the *-te iru* construction. This pattern is also similar to that of English activity verbs.

- (5) a. Kare-ga hon-o yomu.  
he-NOM book-ACC read  
He reads a book.
- b. Kare-ga hon-o yon-de iru.  
he-NOM book-ACC read-TE IRU  
He is reading a book.
- c. Kare-ga hashiru.  
he-NOM run  
He runs.
- d. Kare-ga hashit-te iru.  
he-NOM run-TE IRU  
He is running.

(ACC = accusative)

III. Instantaneous verbs have a resultative state meaning in the *-te iru* construction. This shows a Japanese-specific semantic property.

- (6) a. Kare-ga kizuku.  
he-NOM notice  
He will notice it.

- b. Kare-ga kizui-*te iru*.  
he-NOM notice-TE IRU  
He is aware of it.
- c. Akari-ga tsuku.  
light-NOM light up  
The lights come on.
- d. Akari-ga tsui-*te iru*.  
light-NOM light up-TE IRU  
The lights are on.

IV. Type Four verbs must appear in the *-te iru* construction. This class of verbs does not appear without the *-te iru* form in a sentence, which is a Japanese-specific structural requirement.

- (7) a. \*Kare-wa sugureru.  
he-TOP be excellent  
He is excellent.
- b. Kare-wa sugure-*te iru*.  
he-TOP be excellent-TE IRU  
He is excellent.
- c. \*Sore-wa arifureru.  
that-TOP be common
- d. Sore-wa arifure-*te iru*.  
that-TOP be common-TE IRU  
That is common.

Accordingly, Table 1 shows the comparison of Vendler's (1957) English verb classes and Kindaichi's (1950) Japanese verb classes in terms of semantic and structural properties.

**Table 1. Comparison of Vendler's English Verb Classes and Kindaichi's Japanese Verb Classes**

English verb class	-ing	Japanese verb class	-te iru
States	X	Stative	X
		Type Four	stative
Activities	progressive	Continuative	progressive
Accomplishments	progressive		
Achievements	*	Instantaneous	resultative state

Note. X = ungrammatical; \*achievements with the *-ing* form can be available, which imply "reaching an end point."

It should also be noted that a verb in Japanese is not always translated into a verb of an equivalent class in English. For example, the English verb *know* is a state verb, but its lexical equivalent in Japanese is the verb *shiru* (get to know), Kindaichi's instantaneous verb which corresponds to achievement in Vendler's analysis. Its *-te iru* form *shit-te iru* (know) semantically corresponds to the English verb *know*.

Further complicated characteristics are observed in Japanese verbs. Koike (2002, 2009) examined the structural and semantic characteristics of Japanese motion verbs. Japanese motion verbs are divided into path verbs (e.g., *agaru* [go up], *oriru* [go down], *modoru* [go back]) and manner verbs (e.g., *hashiru* [run], *aruku* [walk], *oyogu* [swim]) based on their lexicalization types. The former express the fact of motion and its path, whereas the latter express the fact of motion and its manner. These two types of motion verbs show differences in the interpretation of the *-te iru* construction as below:

- (8) a. Kare-ga ima 2-kai-ni agat-*te iru*.  
he-NOM now 2nd floor-to go up-TE IRU  
He is going up to the 2nd floor now. (progressive)  
He has gone up to the 2nd floor (and stays there now). (resultative state)
- b. Kare-ga ima hashi-*te iru*.  
he-NOM now run-TE IRU  
He is running now. (progressive)



As shown in these examples, with path verbs such as *agaru* (go up) and *oriru* (go down), the interpretation can be either a progressive or resultative state. However, with manner verbs such as *hashiru* (run) and *aruku* (walk), sentences are interpreted only as progressive. Japanese path verbs can generally be analyzed as accomplishment ([–static], [+telic], [–punctual]) whereas Japanese manner verbs as activity ([–static], [–telic], [–punctual]) in Vendler's (1957) classification. Japanese motion verbs exhibit even more complicated patterns with different particles and arguments, and Koike (2009) concluded that the different interpretations are attributed to telicity and the roles of arguments, which further interact with lexical information.

Furthermore, the *-te iru* construction can express experiential state as well, which is distinguished from resultative state. The former typically occurs with an adverbial indicating a completed event such as *ichi-do* (once) and *kyonen* (last year), but the latter occurs with an adverbial such as *ima* (now) and *mada* (still) (Ogihara, 1998), as shown in the following examples.

- (9) a. Kare-wa ima eiga-o mi-te iru.  
he-TOP now movie-ACC watch-TE IRU  
He is watching a movie now. (progressive)
- b. Kare-wa 3-do kono eiga-o mi-te iru.  
he-TOP 3-cl this movie-ACC watch-TE IRU  
He has the experience of watching this movie three times.  
(experiential state)
- c. Kare-wa ima kekkon shi-te iru.  
he-TOP now get married-TE IRU  
He is married now. (resultative state)
- d. Kare-wa 2-do kekkon shi-te iru.  
he-TOP 2-cl get married-TE IRU  
He has the experience of getting married two times. (experiential state)

As shown above, the continuative verb *miru* (watch) can have an experiential state meaning in addition to a progressive meaning. Also, the instantaneous verb *kekkon suru* (get married) can have an experiential state meaning in addition to a resultative state meaning. Not only verb classes but also other elements such as adverbials affect the interpretation of the sentences.

## L2 Acquisition of Aspect

It has been claimed that lexical aspect influences the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology (Andersen, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Robison, 1995; Shirai & Kurono, 1998); the aspect hypothesis proposes that the inherent semantic aspect of verbs affect early language learners in their acquisition of tense-aspect markers (Andersen & Shirai, 1994). For example, past perfect morphology emerges with achievements and accomplishments but imperfective morphology emerges with activities and states. Progressive morphology is strongly associated with activities.

Cross-linguistic influences have been reported as well. L1 transfer has been observed in the acquisition of aspect in L2 English (Gabriele, Maekawa, & Banon, 2009; Gabriele, Martohardjono, & McClure, 2003), L2 Japanese (Nishi & Shirai, 2007; Sugaya & Shirai, 2007), and L2 Spanish (Montrul & Slabakova, 2003; Gabriele, Banon, Prego, & Canales, 2015). Lardiere (2009) argued that L2 learners face the greatest difficulty when the L1 and L2 differ in the combination of lexical items and their features and when a single morphological form encodes several features.

Moreover, Gabriele (2009) pointed out that Japanese learners of English need to rule out a resultative state interpretation for achievements with the progressive *-ing* when learning English aspect. It is predicted that ruling out the existing L1 semantic representation is more difficult than learning an additional representation that can be facilitated by positive evidence. It has been reported that ruling out interpretations that are available in the L1 but not in the L2 is a challenge for L2 learners (Gabriele et al., 2015; Hirakawa, 2001; Shibata, 1999). It is also proposed that learners' success depends on several factors, including specific morphological encoding of tense and aspect and complexity of the semantic computation (Gabriele, 2009; Gabriele & McClure, 2011). Furthermore, Gabriele (2009) suggested that the input is important in the domain of semantics in which the cues are often subtle. The components of a sentence need to be integrated compositionally, and extralinguistic information must be successfully integrated into their evaluation of a given form.

## Teaching English Aspect

The comparison of English and Japanese aspectual verb classes shows cross-linguistic variation. There are both similarities and differences in lexical, syntactic, and semantic properties between the two languages; although lexical properties of verb classes are similar, some differences are observed especially in their semantic properties. There is also a mismatch in verb classes between a lexical item in English and its lexical equiv-

alent in Japanese. Therefore, Japanese learners of English may have great difficulty in associating the form with the meaning and transfer L1 features in learning aspectual properties of English. Moreover, the aspectual hypothesis predicts that learners will overextend the use of the progressive to other verb classes.

Therefore, acquiring metalinguistic knowledge through explicit instruction is crucial for L2 learners to learn aspectual rules and patterns of English. Teachers need to raise attention and awareness in L2 classrooms and help learners to understand L1-L2 differences to master the target grammatical structures. Specifically, I propose the following: (a) instruction that focuses on lexical properties of verb classes and their syntactic and semantic properties associated with their lexical meanings and (b) instruction that helps learners to compare their L1 and L2 and to be aware of their differences.

Moreover, as Gabriele (2009) suggested, the input is important for the acquisition of semantic properties in which the cues are not often obvious; it helps L2 learners to evaluate a form and a sentence with respect to a particular context. Similarly, Smith (1993) argued that input enhancement (i.e., a variety of things that might draw learners' attention to features) may increase the chances for learners to notice and learn the target features. Thus, input as well as explicit instruction helps L2 learners to associate the meaning with the form in an appropriate context.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the importance of grammar instruction for second language learners, focusing on English aspect. It has been observed that there are cross-linguistic similarities and differences in aspectual properties between English and Japanese, suggesting that many Japanese learners of English may have difficulty learning English aspect. Learners need to understand L1-L2 differences to overcome such influences. Moreover, not only learners' L1 but also universal processes of learning aspect are thought to affect L2 acquisition. It is also suggested that grammar should be viewed as a multidimensional system, and learners need to associate the form and meaning of the target construction to be able to use it appropriately. Therefore, it is important to help L2 learners to acquire metalinguistic knowledge through explicit instruction and to raise attention and awareness in class. Furthermore, appropriate input helps learners to learn the target features effectively.

## Bio Data

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